

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

October 1998

## OCTOBER HAPPENINGS

There will be no regular Historical Society meeting held in October. As always, we will hold our tour of Cedar Rest Cemetery on Halloween night at sunset.

This is the sixth year we have held the Halloween tour, but for those of you who may not be familiar with it the scenario is as follows:

Guides lead groups of visitors through candle lit pathways to selected sites where Historical Society members dressed in costumes of the period stand by the graves of people they are portraying. The actors then recite short biographies of the lives of those people. The visitors then move on to the next site.

A donation of \$1 at the cemetery is customary.

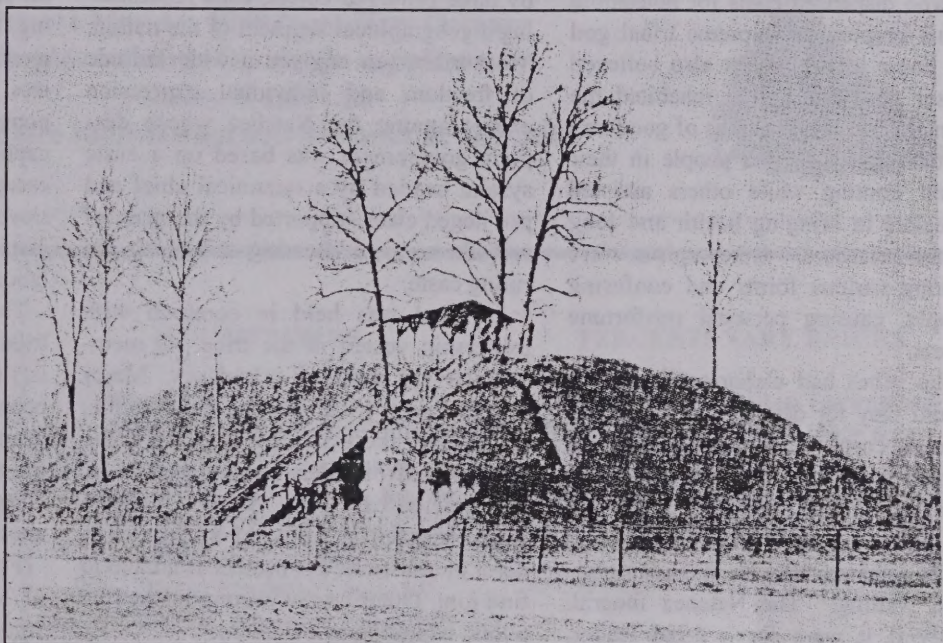
When the tour has been completed visitors are invited to visit the Loblano House around the corner on Cue street for refreshments.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Over 700 visitors came to the cemetery tour last year and hope to exceed that number this year. We will appreciate any baked goods (cookies, candy, cakes, etc.) or trick-or-treat candy you would like to donate to help bribe the creatures that may descend on Loblano House that night. Just drop them off at Loblano House before Halloween.

We could also use a few more 2-liter clear soft drink bottles. We use them to make hurricane globes for our pathway lights.

See President on page 3



Ninih Waiya Mound  
Burial and Ceremonial Ground of the Choctaw Nation

## MISSISSIPPI'S INDIANS BEFORE THE EUROPEANS CAME

A greater variety of tribes and a heavier Indian population lived in Mississippi than any other state in the Southeast. At the time of the European intrusion, tribes included Acolapissa, Bayougoula, Biloxi, and Pascagoula on the Gulf, the Natchez on the lower Mississippi, the Chackchiuma, Coula, Houma, Ibitoupa, Karoa, Taposa, Tiou and Yazoo on the Yazoo River and its tributaries, and the Tunica in northwestern Mississippi. The Choctaws occupied the center and south, and the Chickasaws the north and northeast.

The culture of the Mississippi tribes was similar, with the most significant

differences in language. The most populous tribes, the Choctaws with about 20,000 tribesmen and the Chickasaws and Natchez each numbering about 4,500, had a common language heritage in Muskogean. The Biloxi spoke a Siouian dialect. Early Europeans described Muskogean as "very agreeable to the ear, courteous, gentle and musical....the women in particular so fine and musical as to represent the singing of birds." No Mississippi tribe had a written language.

The rich folklore of the tribes included a creation epic, an account of a migration from the "setting sun" to the "land of the great river," and the epic of a flood in which people and wild creatures escaped on rafts.



Tribal religions explained life processes – birth, puberty, maturation and death. Each included belief in a supreme being who, through his agents, created man and things. The sun was the most important part of the deity force, the Great Holy Fire above, represented in each town by a sacred fire watched over by guardian priests who dispensed coals for household fires, thus keeping the supreme tribal god in each home. The Indians also believed that lesser gods and spirits inhabited the environment and were sources of good and evil. Some spirits helped people in their work and hunting while others assisted tribal healers in bringing health and long life to the members. Other spirits were evil, taking various forms and confusing the people, causing personal misfortune and illness.

As the tribes had elaborate rituals for life so did they for death. The Choctaws placed each corpse on a scaffold. At the appropriate time, a class of citizens called bone pickers cleaned the flesh from the bones, performed appropriate rituals and buried the remains, all with much lamentation and wailing. The Natchez funeral, especially if it were for a tribal leader, might involve the sacrifice of wives and followers, their spirits accompanying the departed into the promised land. The Chickasaws buried their dead in the floor of the household of the deceased. The corpse was interred in a sitting position facing west, so that his spirit would find its way to the land of the hereafter. A special class of mourners, all women, wailed daily over the grave for a year.

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Mississippi tribes followed the clan system of social organization with each tribe divided into two moieties and each of these two divisions divided into clans. Members were required to marry outside their clans. Descent was traced through the female line. The principal clan in each division provided the political and religious leaders for their tribe.

The tribes were town dwellers with each town governed by a council of clan elders. The towns were confederated into a nation

with a national council and principal chief or chiefs. Most matters were settled at the town level of government, while the principal function of the national government was promoting the general welfare and protecting the common interests of the nation. The Choctaws used a system in which national power was shared by three principal chiefs, each representing a geographical segment of the nation. Most tribesmen enjoyed a wide latitude of freedom and individual expression except among the Natchez whose despotic government was based on a caste system headed by a tyrannical chief and privileged class supported by the mass of serf-like subjects bearing tribute to the ruling caste.

All land was held in common with ownership vested in the tribe, its members having right of occupancy. Major crimes under tribal law were homicide, blasphemy, theft and adultery, with the clan council of elders passing judgment. In homicide cases, the victim's relatives were expected to find and kill the murderer or substitute his brother if unable to find him. Other crimes were punished by public whipping and ridicule.

#### THE ECONOMY

Before the coming of the Europeans, food, shelter, clothing and other simple needs were met by hunting and gathering, by agriculture, commerce with other tribes and plunder from war. The tribesmen felled large sycamore and cottonwood trees, hollowed the trunks by fire and scraped the charred insides, with clam shells or sharpened stones to fashion river boats. Pines provided lumber for house frames and pitch torches for night lights. Cane served for weaving baskets and mats, fish traps, seines and fences. Warriors used hollow cane stalks as blow guns. Hickory was used for heavy containers and siding of the winter house as well as mortar sets for grinding grain. Hickory and black locust were favored woods for bows and arrows.

While the Mississippi tribes obtained basic foods from nature (deer, bear and fish), they were primarily agricultural,

with corn their main crop. Between the grain hills, the farmers planted melons, pumpkins, sunflowers, beans, peas and tobacco. From the earth they gathered clay for cooking and storage utensils.

The economic life of the Mississippi Indians was enriched by commerce with other tribes, trading deer skins and bear oil for special materials used in fashioning tools and hunting and war implements, conch shells for ceremonial chalices and sheet copper for ornaments. A popular trade item was the Indian slave, captured in inter-tribal wars. To prevent escape, slaveholders mutilated their slaves' feet by cutting nerves or sinews just above the instep, enabling them to labor but not flee.

Through the centuries the Mississippi tribes had developed a self-contained, satisfying lifestyle sufficient for their social, economic and spiritual needs. The European intrusion, beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, provoked dramatic changes and ultimately destroyed their aboriginal lifestyle.

(From Gibson, Arrell M., "The Indians of Mississippi," in *A History of Mississippi*, Vol. 1, Richard Aubrey McLemore, ed., University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973.)

Editor's Note: The next issue of *The Historian* will feature a brief examination of the lives of Mississippi's Native Americans from the arrival of the Europeans to their removal under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830.)

#### HISTORY WORKSHOP OFFERED

William Carey College is offering a workshop titled "Colonial Family History in the Lower Mississippi Valley". Classes will be conducted by G. Douglas Inglis of Seville, Spain on November 5th and 6th from 6 to 9 PM and on November 7 from 9:30 AM to 5 PM. Students may earn one-semester hour of undergraduate credit for the workshop, or it may be audited. To register, or for information on cost, please contact Ashley Haigler at (288) 897-7103.



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### PRESIDENT from page 1

Thank you who have already brought us bottles. More than 250 have been cut to size and are ready to brighten our way through that dark night. Last year we used 300 lights.

Apparently Mary Lou Cucullu had 270 votive candles in excess of her immediate needs and donated them to us. This will mean a considerable savings for us to light the cemetery. We are delighted to be so well lighted.

Mr. and Mrs. John Ohman have rejoined the Society now that they are spending more time at their summer home in Bay Saint Louis. You may remember, Mrs. Ohman was our Treasurer in 1995-96 when we began the 1,000 square foot addition to Lobrano House. Mr. Ohman, arranged for his company, Lykes Steamship Company in New Orleans, to donate and deliver a walk-in vault to us. Thank you, John and Buddy and welcome back.

Hurricane Georges split the water oak in front of Lobrano House from the fork about head high to the ground and it had to be removed. It was a threat to safety on the church playground next door as well as to the street and our property. We will miss the shade. HOWEVER, that very shade prevented our planting roses along the south half of the front fence and that obstacle no longer exists. Old garden roses to match those along the north fence cost about \$20 each to purchase and plant. If you would like to donate toward

### NEW MEMBERS

B. D Randolph, Corpus Christi, TX  
Harry Gilmore, Jr., Bay Saint Louis, MS  
Grace Santa Cruz, Bay Saint Louis, MS  
Sandra Clifford, Bay Saint Louis, MS  
David Clifford, Bay Saint Louis, MS  
Greg Perry, Diamondhead, MS  
Gary Taylor, Bay Saint Louis, MS  
Buddy Ohman, Bay Saint Louis, MS  
John Ohman, Bay Saint Louis, MS

purchasing a rose bush, please call Karen at 467-4090. Charles H. Gray

### IT IS ELECTION TIME

The election of officers to the Board of Directors of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at the November meeting. The following vacancies will be filled:

<u>Office</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>
1st Vice Presidents	Ames Kergosien and Roland Schexnayder
Secretary	Cathy Benvenuti
Membership	Marlene Johnson
Publicity	Edith Back

Nominations will be accepted from the floor before the vote is taken.

### TERCENTENARY BRICKS

Remember to order your Tercentenary brick. Call 467-4090 to place order.

### LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MONDAY	8 a.m.
through	to
FRIDAY	4 p.m.

### THE

## HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Publisher  
Editor

Charles H. Gray  
Edith Back

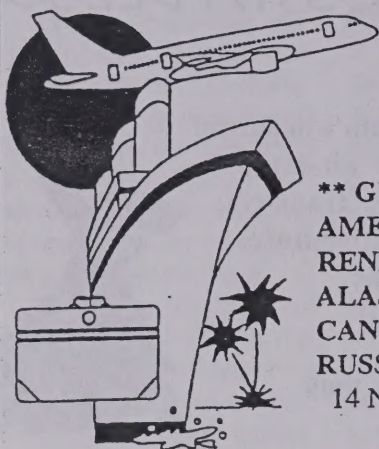
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### HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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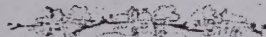


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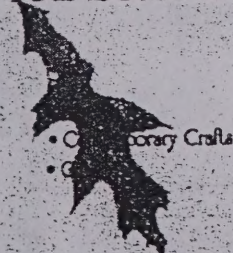
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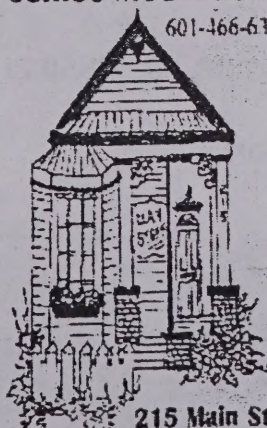
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**Four Seasons**



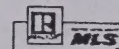
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# HANCOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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